

Women, Men and Language, by Jennifer Coates, London: Longman, 1986, paper, vii, 178 pages, \$14.95 CDN, ISBN 0-582-29133-X.

This new text was written primarily for a British audience, for both general readers and for those with a background in linguistics. It concentrates on research in language and sex (Coates avoids the term gender because of its ambiguity for linguists) carried out in Britain and on English. However, the scope is wide, ranging from excellent summaries and criticism of the work of grammarians such as Jespersen (and the establishment of men's purported usage as the norm), of traditional dialectology (with its male biases in methodology) and of the early anthropological literature (with its concentration on sex-exclusive 'languages' in 'exotic' cultures) to modern sociolinguistic research on sex differences, in both quantitative and social interactional frameworks. A final section of the text explores both the causes and consequences of such differences (e.g., in linguistic innovation, conversational strategies, etc.), treating, in turn, their acquisition, the role they play in linguistic change and the social consequences of miscommunication (between the sexes) and disadvantage (for females, particularly in education).

It is a difficult task to summarize and synthesize such a large body of research, written from a variety of theoretical perspectives, but Coates for the most part writes with exceptional clarity. In this respect I particularly liked chapters on sex differences in communicative competence and on quantitative studies. Coates' explanations of technical terms such as social network, crossover pattern, and participant observation are quite good. There are a few lapses, however; the definitions of the linguistic variable and of change in apparent time are vague while the concept of speech community is never really explained. On the whole, though, the book is well-written.

For the North American reader, the book is especially useful in that it provides excellent summaries of a number of recent British studies, published and unpublished, which are not at all well known on this side of the Atlantic. From the point of view of the undergraduate student, however, many of the examples used in the text will be unfamiliar (e.g., reference to changes in the hiring patterns of the BBC with respect to accent). Although, in general, major North American works are cited (e.g., by Labov, Kramarae, Maltz

and Borker, and Zimmerman and West), there are serious omissions. For instance, Macoby and Jacklin's (1974) survey of the literature on sex differences in child language acquisition, in which they conclude that girls do seem to be better language learners, is treated as authoritative. Coates does not mention Louise Cherry's (1975) survey of the same literature in which she pinpoints many problems in research design in the early work in the field and concludes that, because of these problems and also because of the paucity of more recent research, the question of sex differences in L₁ acquisition remains open.

The most serious problem with this book, in which three chapters are devoted to women's and men's roles in linguistic variation and change, is that Patricia Nichols' work (1983, etc.) is not cited. In a somewhat more sophisticated fashion, Coates maintains Trudgill's notion that women and men play different roles in linguistic change because they adapt to different speech norms (cf. Trudgill's overt and covert prestige). Where women have been found to innovate in the direction of the vernacular (e.g., the young Clonard women in the Milroy's Belfast study), the explanation is that, with changing sex roles, women are developing closeknit, 'male-type' social networks and are adopting male speech norms. That closeknit social networks are more strongly associated with one sex or the other is highly debatable. Nichols (1983:66) provides a far better explanation of women's (and men's) role in linguistic change:

The linguistic choices made by both men and women are always constrained by the options made available to them, and these options are available always and only in the context of a group which shares rules for the use and interpretation of language. To speak of 'women's language' outside that context is linguistically naive.

Thus women's role in linguistic change can be explained in terms of their social role in different speech communities, or, as is the case in Nichols' own work in Georgetown County, South Carolina, in terms of the different social roles that different groups of women occupy within the same speech community. I understand that Nichols' work is not well-known in Britain; she is, however, cited widely in the recent North American literature to which Coates should have had access.

One final criticism is the anti-Chomskyan polemic scattered throughout the book. After more than two decades (i.e., since Labov's landmark research), sociolinguists do not need to justify their existence, particularly in this context. Coates' clearly

anti-formalist stance also leads her to make claims such as that 'linguistic change can only take place in the context of linguistic variation, and linguistic variation is *merely* a reflection of social variation' (p. 150, my italics). This is at the very least overstatement.

Despite these problems, the book is well-organized and quite readable. I would recommend the chapters on linguistic variation and change (Chapters 4, 5 and 8) for students who already have some background in linguistics (i.e., at least a technical introductory course). These chapters should, of course, be supplemented by other readings. The remaining six chapters are appropriate for the beginning student as well as the more advanced, with the proviso that many of the British examples will need explaining.

REFERENCES

- CHERRY, Louise J. 1975. 'Sex differences in child speech: McCarthy revisited.' Research Bulletin. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service.
- MACOBY, E.E. and C.N. Jacklin. 1974. The Psychology of Sex Differences. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- NICHOLS, Patricia C. 1983. 'Linguistic options and choices for Black women in the rural south.' In Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae and Nancy Henley (eds.), Language, Gender and Society, 54-68. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Ruth King
York University